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SUBJECT: OLD GUARD HAZARA POLITICOS RESIST GRASSROOTS
DEMOCRATIZATION

Classified By: Political Counselor Alan Yu for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C/NF) SUMMARY. Afghanistan's Hazara minority remains entrenched with the same political parties and leadership that have guided the ethnic group for the past 15 years. A handful of elder statesmen and warlords lead these parties, which are a legacy of the predominately Shia Hazaras' refuge in Iran and resistance to the Taliban government. There are signs, however, that a younger generation of Hazaras grows restless with its elders, who refuse to democratize or decentralize their parties' operations. This new generation hopes to separate Hazara politics from Iranian patrons and create more opportunities for Hazaras nation-wide. For the time being, though, a handful of influential leaders still controls the bulk of Hazara resources and votes.

Politics Grounded in Recent Mujahideen Past

12. (SBU) Hezb-e-Wahdat ("Unity" in Dari) is the main political body representing Hazaras, tracing its origins to the unification of nine Shia parties under the leadership of Abdul Ali Mazari after the Soviet invasion. In recent years, the party fractured between Second Vice President Karim Khalili and MP Haji Mohammad Mohaqqueq (Kabul). Other major Hazara parties, such as the Harakat party of non-Hazara Shia Ayatollah Muhammad Asif Mohseni, generally revolve around individual leaders and deemphasize grassroots support. Second-tier leaders such as MP Ustad Mohammad Akbari (Bamyan) maintain their own networks and pursue their own alliances, but ultimately cannot compete with the popularity and financial resources of Mohaqqueq and Khalili.

13. (SBU) Khalili and Mohaqqueq divide the lion's share of Hazara and Wahdat support. As popular disillusionment with Karzai grows, Khalili has suffered and Mohaqqueq has benefited. Mohaqqueq claims significant support in Kabul, his home base in Mazar-e-Sharif, and the country's central highlands, called the Hazarajat due to its high concentration of Hazaras. He launched a hunger strike and demonstration last summer in protest of Kuchi nomad incursions on Hazara-held grazing lands, boosting his popularity. Khalili retains influence in the Hazarajat and commands much of the Wahdat infrastructure after his split with Mohaqqueq. Both claim the support of the majority of Hazara MPs in Parliament, though Mohaqqueq probably has an edge.

Hazara Leaders Choose Top-Down Approach Over Grassroots

14. (SBU) Mohaqqueq and Khalili share a top-down approach to the management of their respective factions, and neither appears willing to cede power to provincial- or district-level organizations. Khalili's son, Mohammad Taqi, said his father chooses party officials for provincial-level

leadership positions. Taqi hopes to inherit the party's reins within 10 years, on the assumption that his father will maintain a centralized control over the party. Mohaqqueq takes a similar approach to provincial-level politics within his Wahdat faction. A Balkh Provincial Council member said his Kabul-based leader makes all the decisions for Wahdat followers in Balkh, and he himself is reluctant to offer opinions on issues without first clearing them through Mohaqqueq.

Shia Connection With Iran Tied to Financial Support

¶5. (C/NF) Cognizant of US concerns with Iran, Mohaqqueq, Khalili and other Hazaras point fingers at each other, accusing rivals of drawing checks from the Iranian government. Likewise, other Afghans suspect Iran uses the Shia Hazara to win influence in Afghanistan. Many Hazara political and media organizations receive funding from Iran, and many Hazara leaders enjoy long relationships with the Iranian government dating back to their years as refugees and exiles during the Soviet occupation. But the nature and goals of these relationships are often unclear, and allegations of Iranian collusion are rarely backed up with proof.

Younger Generation Hopes for Reform

¶6. (SBU) Younger Hazaras say they grow restless with a leadership tied to an old way of politics. Hazaras, historically persecuted by other ethnicities, have developed

KABUL 00003097 002 OF 002

a relatively educated, media savvy younger generation. Although they have fewer positions of power outside of the Hazarajat, anecdotal observations suggest Hazaras make up a disproportionate number of civil society activists and journalists in Kabul. Hazara youth have also staked out a dominant presence among Afghanistan's major ethnic groups on the Internet. Hazara-run blogs and websites show a professionalism and dedication few Tajik-, Uzbek- or Pashtun-based media can match (Taqi Khalili proudly showed us a translation into Dari of President-elect Obama's victory speech he posted to the Wahdat website two days after the US election).

¶7. (SBU) Some Hazaras (occasionally financed by the Hazara ex-pat community) are distancing themselves from mujahideen and Iranian influence. Several groups and nascent parties plan to challenge Wahdat for seats in provincial and parliamentary elections, giving voice to Hazaras displeased with the influence of Iran and outdated party structures in their politics. Akram Gizabi, an AmCit Hazara, says his Civil Movement of Afghanistan party will compete for a provincial council seat in Bamyān, Daikundi, Kabul, Wardak, and Ghazni provinces next year on a pro-Western, anti-Iran platform. Raihanah Royan, a 20-year-old Daikundi provincial council member, said she won votes in 2005 from young Hazaras alienated by Wahdat. She said a Hazara youth party in Daikundi hopes to win two of the province's four Lower House seats in 2010 by focusing on grassroots organization.

¶8. (SBU) Niyaz-e-Milli ("National Need") party leader and MP Fatima Nazari (Kabul) said her group has organized Hazaras for the past two years to reject Wahdat as the sole voice for the ethnic group, arguing that current leaders are unable to secure development and opportunities for Hazaras. In addition, one of the only pro-Western factions in Parliament, the Third Line, draws support from a handful of Hazara MPs. Mir Ahmad Joyenda (Kabul) and Mohammad Noor Akbari (Daikundi) cite their distaste of Iranian influence among Hazara leaders for their refusal to join Wahdat and willingness to join a faction led by a Kabul-based Pashtun, Shukria Barakzai.

Grassroots Remains Untested

19. (C/NF) These Hazara reform movements have their work cut out for them if they expect to challenge the lock on local politics held by Mohaqgeq, Khalili and other senior leaders. But the longer Hazaras see undemocratic leaders reliant on Iran representing their communities in the provincial governments and the National Assembly, the more grassroots groups will demand change. Many turn to the West for help and inspiration, but feel they cannot compete with the old guard and their Iranian patrons if money will decide elections. As is the challenge for all non-mujahideen parties, it is unclear how many Hazara voters will reject the legacy of their elders and war heroes to support untested and underfinanced politicians.

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